



# Sun Safety

## What Outdoor-Based Employees Should Know

### Sun Safety Is Important!

Safety issues are an important concern for outdoor-based employees. Safety personnel review, plan, and implement numerous safety measures related to construction, maintenance procedures, and other outdoor duties to protect all staff. Yet sun safety is often neglected, despite the sun's dominant, daily presence in the sky.

This oversight persists despite the fact that one in five Americans is expected to get skin cancer in his or her lifetime, chiefly caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight. With over one million new cases expected this year, skin cancer is now considered an epidemic. Each year there are more new cases of skin cancer than the collective total of new cancers of the prostate, breast, lung, and colon! In addition to skin cancer, excessive exposure to sunlight can cause accelerated aging (wrinkles and blotches), cataracts, and a weakened immune system.

Tanning also injures the skin. For both children and adults, tanning is an outward sign of internal skin damage. The idea that a tan indicates health is a social myth, not a factual reality.

### Skin Cancer Rates are Rising

Skin cancer rates have increased dramatically, especially in the last few decades, from these and other factors:

- Increased leisure time devoted to outdoor activities
- Decrease in the coverage of clothing worn
- National population migration to sunnier states
- Decreasing amounts of stratospheric ozone that partially protects the earth's surface from receiving cancer-producing UV radiation.
- Tanning is falsely viewed as healthy
- General aging of the population

California is a sun belt state that – for outdoor workers – presents a high-risk environment for developing skin cancer.

### Three Major Forms of Skin Cancer

There are actually more than 200 types of cancer that may appear in the skin. The three major forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), and melanoma – the deadliest form. Skin cancer can develop anywhere on the body but most often appears on surfaces receiving the greatest amount of sunlight. BCC and SCC often take the form of a pale, wax-like, pearly bump or a red, scaly, sharply outlined patch. The patches may crust, discharge pus, and sometimes bleed.



Cover up!





Cover up!



Seek shade!



If not treated early, SCC may spread to other parts of the body. Less than one percent of people with SCC or BCC will die from skin cancer. For many individuals, these two skin cancers can cause some disfigurement based on the amount of damaged skin the physician must remove or alter. Fortunately, the potential negative effects of surgery or other treatments can be greatly minimized when the diseases are treated in their early stages.

**Malignant melanoma** is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. It often arises from or near a mole. An individual should see his or her doctor (especially a dermatologist) if he has a mole or growth that has any one of these features:

- If divided in half, the two resulting parts would not have the same shape.
- It has jagged or rough edges.
- It has two or more colors (which may be mixed together).
- It is wider than a standard pencil eraser.

Melanoma does not necessarily appear on parts of the body exposed to sunlight. While light-skinned people have a greater risk of getting melanoma, this disease is growing among people of color.

### Timing and Environmental Sun Safety Issues

UV radiation is more intense under certain time frames or conditions:

- From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- When there is lack of thick cloud cover
- From mid-spring through mid-fall
- At higher altitudes

It is important to remember that outdoor work environments – especially between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., from March through October – can be likened to a **radiation chamber**. Also, reflective surfaces like water and glass can direct additional UV rays toward people.

### Personal Risk Factors

While skin cancer can afflict any individual – regardless of skin color – light-skinned people are at highest risk. Individuals most likely to succumb often have some of these characteristics:

- Fair skin
- Blue, green, or hazel eyes
- Light-colored hair
- Freckles
- A tendency to burn rather than tan
- A history of severe sunburns
- Have many moles (over 50 – 100)
- A personal or family history of skin cancer.
- Outdoor worker



## The Mandate for Action by Safety Staff

Since many employees spend much of their day outside, safety personnel have a strong imperative to integrate sun safety principles and practice into daily operations (see the accompanying sun-safe policy template). Besides protecting employee's health, this approach can help guard against potential liability and litigation resulting from skin cancer or severe burns experienced by outdoor workers.

## Skin Cancer Prevention

The recommended strategies for reducing skin cancer risk are:

- Reduce sun exposure from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest. (This is especially important from mid-spring through mid-fall.)
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat (at least 4-inch brim) that produces a shadow that covers the eyes, nose, face, ears, and neck.
- Wear tightly-woven, loose-fitting clothing that covers as much of the body as possible, weather permitting.
- When feasible, find shade (trees, physical structures) to shield you, especially from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Use sunglasses that include a warranty stating that they provide 100 percent UVA and UVB (broad-spectrum) protection. Prescription glasses can have an UV-protective coating applied to the lens.
- Liberally apply sunscreen to exposed skin one-half hour before going outdoors. The sunscreen container should have a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or above and should state that it provides broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) protection. PABA-free sunscreens are recommended for persons with sensitive skin. Depending on outdoor conditions, sunscreen should be reapplied at least every two hours.
- Individuals with sensitive skin may want to test a new sunscreen on a small portion of skin to see if any negative reactions occur in 24 hours.
- Use lip balm with a SPF of 15 or greater.
- Avoid tanning salons, booths, and sunlamps.

• **CAUTION!** Don't depend on sunscreen alone to protect you from skin cancer. Instead, rely as much as possible on a combination of all the tips just listed.

Crew supervisors should model sun protective behaviors. Employees may want to utilize a skin cancer prevention "buddy system" to reinforce and support their commitment to practice sun safety. Skin cancer prevention education materials should be taken home by employees to encourage their children to utilize sun protection strategies.

On a personal level, employees should use a hand mirror to perform a self skin examination every one to three months to check moles and other possible signs of skin cancer as previously described. See a dermatologist if you suspect any problems. Skin cancer is relatively easy to treat **if** it is diagnosed in its early stages.



Cover up!





## **Skin Cancer Treatment**

Eighty to 90 percent of skin cancers are treated with surgery. Other solutions include radiation therapy, electrodesiccation (tissue destruction by heat), cryosurgery (tissue destruction by freezing), laser therapy, and drug therapy.

## **Description of California Department of Health Services –**

### **Skin Cancer Prevention Program**

The Outdoor-Based Business Sun Safety Kit was produced by the Skin Cancer Prevention Program (SCPP). Distribution of this kit is part of a larger campaign to increase public awareness and practice of recommended sun safety behaviors. SCPP utilizes education modalities, policy development, and media productions to advance its objectives. The primary target groups are children under 14 years of age, their parents, and other care providers, along with outdoor workers. If you have questions or comments about skin cancer or this kit, please contact the SCPP at:

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<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/cpns/skin/index.html>

## **Remember to protect the skin you're in!**



**Cover up!**

